





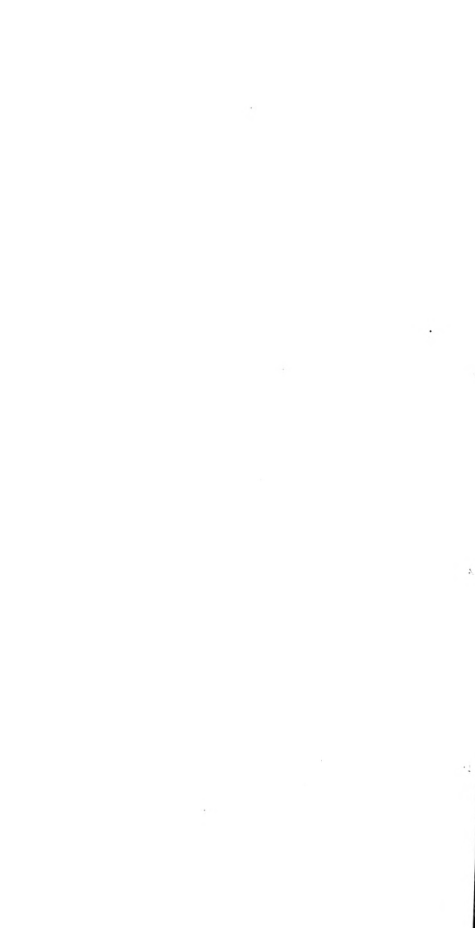






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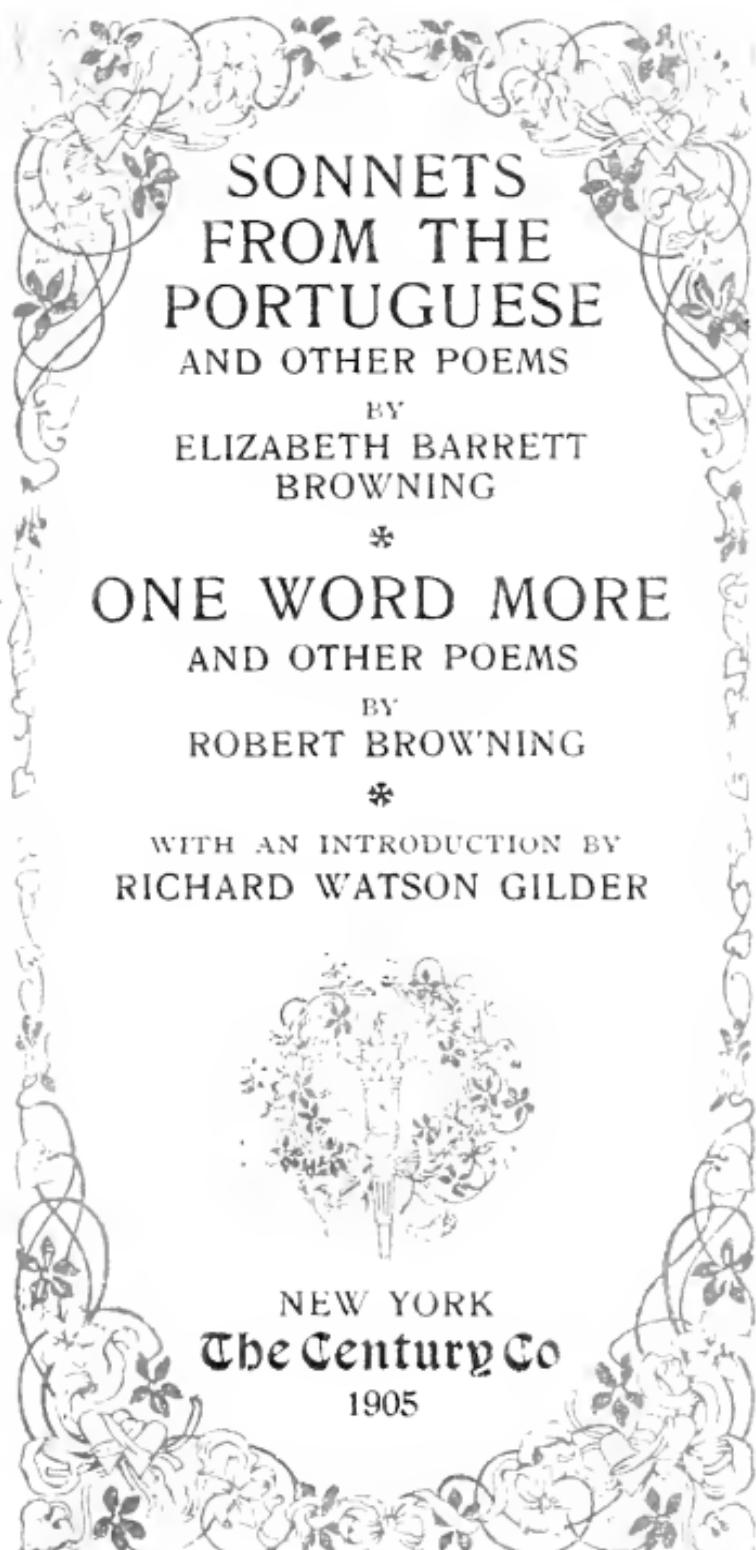
SONNETS FROM THE
PORTUGUESE







Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A decorative border of intertwined vines and leaves surrounds the text.

SONNETS
FROM THE
PORTUGUESE
AND OTHER POEMS

BY
ELIZABETH BARRETT
BROWNING



ONE WORD MORE
AND OTHER POEMS

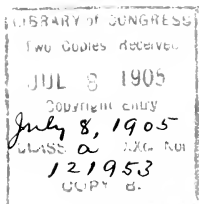
BY
ROBERT BROWNING



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
RICHARD WATSON GILDER



NEW YORK
The Century Co
1905



THE DE VINNE PRESS



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INTRODUCTION

I

IN the very heart and center of our modern world of the nineteenth century there was enacted and immortally sung one of the most exquisite love-histories of which the world has knowledge. The marriage of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett has been well named "the most perfect example of wedded happiness in the history of literature—perfect in the inner life and perfect in its poetical expression."¹

¹ The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Edited with Biographical Additions by Frederic G. Kenyon.

Robert Browning, the brilliant author of "Bells and Pomegranates," and Elizabeth Barrett,¹ the popular and beloved poet, but also the secluded invalid, had friends in common. One of them was Robert Hengist Horne, the author of "Orion." In the preparation of a work of literary criticism, "A New Spirit of the Age," he had the help of friends, his "powerful and most valuable" coadjutor being Miss Barrett. Horne afterward made public "the fact that the mottoes, which are singularly happy and appropriate, were for the most part supplied by Miss Barrett and Robert Browning, then unknown to each other."²

¹ Robert Browning was born in the parish of St. Giles, Camberwell, London, May 7, 1812, and died in Venice, December 12, 1889. Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett was born at Coxhoe Hall, near Durham, March 6, 1806, and died in Florence, June 29, 1861.

² Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

In April, 1842, Miss Barrett pleases her blind mentor, Mr. Boyd, by telling him, at his request, the names of those who have liked her articles in the "Athenæum" on the Greek poets. "Mr. Horne, the poet, and Mr. Browning were not behind in appreciation," she says; and "Mr. Browning is said to be learned in Greek, especially in the dramatists." In the next April she is writing to Mr. Cornelius Matthews in America, and again looms the name of Browning. "I do assure you," she says, "I never saw him in my life—do not know him even by correspondence — and yet, whether through fellow-feeling for Eleusinian mysteries, or whether through the more generous motive of appreciation of his

Addressed to Robert Hengist Horne, with
Comments on Contemporaries. Edited by
S. R. Townshend Mayer.

act more fateful, to bring to her the poet himself. "Kenyon the magnificent," Browning called him, as Bayard Taylor tells us; and it was to this "dear friend and relative" that Mrs. Browning inscribed her lyric "The Dead Pan." Mr. Kenyon, says Mrs. Orr, had often spoken to the Browning family of his invalid cousin, and had given them copies of her works. As early as 1841, indeed, Kenyon had tried to bring about a meeting between the poets, but Miss Barrett had shrunk from it. But when the poet returned to England, late in 1844, he saw the volume containing "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," which had appeared during his absence, and which Kenyon had sent to Miss Browning. "On hearing him express his admiration of it, Kenyon begged him to write

to Miss Barrett, and himself tell her how the poems had impressed him; 'for,' he added, 'my cousin is a great invalid, and sees no one; but great souls jump at sympathy.'"¹

At this time, be it remembered, Elizabeth Barrett was an accepted poet in both England and America, while Robert Browning was slowly approaching, through both critical depreciation and approval, the assured fame of his after years. When, therefore, the young Browning read in "*Lady Geraldine's Courtship*" words of high recognition, his keen appreciation of the writer's genius, and his natural desire for a wider audience, gave the lines to him a very special importance. How familiar now to

¹ *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, by Mrs. Sutherland Orr. For Browning's own account of this see his letter to E. B. B., postmarked November 17, 1845.

the world the stanza is, with its large associations :

Or at times a modern volume,
Wordsworth's solemn-thought-
ed idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's
enchanted reverie, —
Or from Browning some "Pome-
granate," which, if cut deep
down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured,
of a veined humanity.

The correspondence that began with Browning's letter to Elizabeth Barrett of January 10, 1845, and the meeting which took place on May 20th of the same year, led quickly to a great love—amply and exquisitely expressed in the memorable correspondence before marriage; uniquely and with splendid art, in the poetry of both. To her friends, meantime, as the friendship budded and blossomed, Elizabeth, while

keeping her secret, did not refrain from conveying her admiration for her poet acquaintance, and her joy in knowing him. As we read her early correspondence and catch the name of Browning again and again, we seem to hear the footstep of fate: we are, as the later Kenyon says, "like the spectators at a Greek tragedy who watch the development of a drama of which the *dénouement* is already known to them."

Early in her year of miracle, 1845, she writes to Mrs. Martin: "I had a letter from Browning the poet last night, which threw me into ecstasies — Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus,' and king of the mystics"; and once more: "I am getting deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning, poet and

mystic, and we are growing to be the truest of friends." To Mr. Westwood, in April, 1845, she expresses her delight in his appreciation of this poet's "high power—very high, according to my view—very high, and various." In May she writes to an acquaintance in America that Mr. Browning "is a poet for posterity. I have a full faith in him as poet and prophet." To Poe she writes: "Our great poet, Mr. Browning, is enthusiastic in his admiration of the rhythm" of "The Raven."¹ To Mr. Westwood, again, she writes, asking him to tell her honestly if he discovers in her "anything like the Sphinxiness of Browning." As for Browning, she says, "the fault is certainly great," but she finds that "the depth and

¹ John H. Ingram's *Life of Mrs. Browning*.

power of the significance (when it is apprehended) glorifies the puzzle." In May of this year she returns to the inescapable subject in writing to Mr. Westwood, telling him that when he has read "Sordello" he must "read for relaxation and recompense . . . 'Colombe's Birthday,' which is exquisite," though it is "Pippa Passes" that she "kneels to with deepest reverence." Later she praises, to Mrs. Martin, Landon's verses to him whom she calls "my friend and England's poet, Mr. Browning." Early in 1846 she tells Mrs. Martin that a friend, "one of the greatest poets in England, too," has brought her flowers.

Elizabeth Barrett's love-poems can now be read in the light of her love-letters, with which they exquisitely interblend. These love-letters give

her chief prose version of their courtship. But there is a letter of hers to Mrs. Martin, written from Pisa in October of 1846, which with great explicitness and moving eloquence reviews the circumstances of her acquaintance with Browning, and of her marriage without the consent or knowledge of the strangest father in the annals of literature. Mr. Barrett's treatment of the three children who dared to marry, and above all of a daughter who was no less dutiful and affectionate than she was splendid and world-renowned in talents, was so astoundingly hard and unrelenting that one is appalled into reticence of censure, and into wondering contemplation of the psychological peculiarities that could bring about such hideously unpaternal conduct, —questioning, as one must,

whether it could have been this gross stubbornness in him that turned to mental and moral force in the frail and wonderful being who was his child. The marriage took place on September 12, 1846. They flew at once to that "warm climate" which had been wisely prescribed for Elizabeth, but which her father had forbidden her, and where comparatively good health and undreamed-of happiness awaited her.

But the whole story is compassed, in brief, in this one letter to Mrs. Martin: how she had been, after what broke her heart at Torquay,—her brother's death,—as dead as if she had her face against a grave; how five years before Mr. Kenyon had wished to bring Robert Browning to see her, but she had refused, in her blind dislike to seeing strangers; how, after

the publication of her last volumes, he wrote to her; how their correspondence led to her agreeing to see him as she never had received any other man. He wrote, she said, the most exquisite letters possible, having a way of putting things, and she consented—against her will. Then began his attachment, “*infatuation* call it,” resisting the various denials which were her plain duty at the beginning, and persisting past them all. She began, she said, with a grave assurance that she was in an exceptional position, and saw him just in consequence of it, and that he must not recur to “that subject.” He was for a while silent, but meantime the letters and the visits “rained down more and more.” She tried to show him he was throwing into the ashes his best affections;

but he said he loved her, and should, to his last hour. He would wait twenty years, if she pleased. He preferred to be allowed to sit only an hour a day at her side, to the fulfilment of the brightest dream that should exclude her, in any possible world. Then she tells how the doctor had said that all she needed was a "warm climate and air," and her father was no help to her in this. He was not in favor of Italy; his attitude "involved a disappointment in the affections." She tries, in her letter, to palliate the attitude of her father, and explains with pathetic elaboration why a secret marriage and a flight to Italy were necessary to her life and her happiness, as well as a measure due to her faithful and unselfish lover. Then comes the praise of their six happy weeks together, and,

above all, her praise of him of whom she says that "his genius and all but miraculous attainments are the least things in him, the moral nature being of the very noblest, as all who ever knew him admit."

Elizabeth Barrett's chief poetic version of this courtship has long been known to the world in her so-called "Sonnets from the Portuguese," of which it has been said that they are "the most beautiful love-poems ever written by woman to man,"¹ and that they are "unequalled by any English sonnet-series except Shakespeare's own."² Mrs. Ritchie says truly of these "Sonnets": "There is a quality in them which is beyond words; an echo from afar which belongs

¹ A Selection from Mrs. Browning's Poems, by Heloise E. Hersey.

² Victorian Poets, by Edmund Clarence Stedman.

to the highest human expression of feeling.”¹ The complete story of their composition, and of their revelation to him who was their inspiration, has only been put forth since the death of Robert Browning.

It was during their residence in Pisa, early in 1847, that Browning first saw the “Sonnets from the Portuguese,” as the poet Edmund Gosse has told by authority of Browning himself.² “Their custom was,

¹ Dictionary of National Biography.

² Critical Kit-Kats, by Edmund Gosse. Mr. Gosse, by his paper on the Sonnets from the Portuguese, and in his account of Browning's Early Career, first published in the Century Magazine and reprinted in Robert Browning—Personalia, has placed all readers of the Brownings under permanent obligations. It is interesting to recall that this latter article was prepared for the Century Magazine with Browning's consent and coöperation, and that, opposed as was Browning to contribute to periodicals, he allowed two pieces of verse of his to appear in the Century—the lines written in Miss Edith Bronson's album in explanation of his “Touch him ne'er so lightly” (the Century for November, 1882), and the Rawdon Brown sonnet, written at Mrs. Bronson's request

Mr. Browning said, to write alone, and not to show each other what they had written. This was a rule which he sometimes broke through, but she never. He had the habit of working in a down-stairs room, where their meals were spread, while Mrs. Browning studied in a room on the floor above. One day, early in 1847, their breakfast being over, Mrs. Browning went up-stairs, while her husband stood at the window watching the street till the table should be cleared. He was presently aware of some one behind him, although the servant was gone. It was Mrs. Browning, who held him by the shoulder to prevent his turning to look at her, and

(the *Century* for February, 1884). Here also, after his death, were published Mrs. Bronson's two papers of recollections of the poet. Thus were continued the Brownings' traditional relations with America. See, also, *The Brownings and America*, by Elizabeth Porter Gould.

at the same time pushed a packet of papers into the pocket of his coat. She told him to read that, and to tear it up if he did not like it; and then she fled again to her own room." All this was in fulfilment of prophecy; for had she not said in her letter of July 22, 1846, as much as this about the "Sonnets": "You shall see some day at Pisa what I will not show you now. Does not Solomon say that 'there is a time to read what is written'? If he doesn't, he ought."

Browning, notwithstanding his intense love of privacy, took the right ground concerning these works of inimitable art. "I dared not reserve to myself," he said, "the finest sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare's." Mrs. Browning finally consented to their being printed, under Miss Mitford's

care, as "Sonnets | by | E. B. B. | Reading | Not for Publication | 1847," and in the edition of her poems brought out in 1850 they were actually published, with their present title, which was suggested by her husband. The author's suggestion had been "Sonnets translated from the Bosnian"; but Browning, who called the author of "Catarina to Camoens" his "own little Portuguese," named the title that prevailed.¹

Every one of the forty-four "Sonnets from the Portuguese" follows the Italian method rather than the English or Shaksperian sonnet form. Within the form chosen they have an interesting mingling of reg-

¹ Professor Dowden speaks of "the unexpected and wonderful gift" of the Sonnets to her husband at Pisa, as "the highest evidence of his wife's powers as a poet." Robert Browning, by Edward Dowden.

ularity with irregularity. In only seven of the sonnets (Sonnets IV, VIII, XIII, XVI, XXVII, XXXV, and XLIII) is there a full pause at the end of the octave. Otherwise there is great regularity, the whole forty-four poems having the same scheme of rhymes, there being uniformly but two rhymes in the octave and two in the sestet (arranged thus: 1, 2, 2, 1; 1, 2, 2, 1; 3, 4, 3, 4, 3, 4). In the seven sonnets where there is a full pause at the end of the octave, six of these are true pauses, but in one (Sonnet XLIII) there are other pauses which break the effect of the octave. Again, in only three of these seven (Sonnets IV, XIII, and XLIII) are the quatrains of the octave marked. Speaking technically, then, Sonnets IV and XIII are the nearest perfection, though as poems they rank no

higher than others in the series. In this series, though there are such rhymes as "burn" and "scorn," "desert" and "heart," "south" and "truth," the writer has fortunately not ventured upon such extreme experiments in rhyming as earlier she conscientiously pursued.¹ It may be further noted that in fourteen of her other group of forty-four sonnets, all in the Italian form, she rhymes differently in the sestet.

In the body of Mrs. Browning's poetry,—as artistic as it often is, and as lofty in spirit as it always is,—the judicious

¹ For a competent discussion of Mrs. Browning's earlier theory and practice in the matter of rhyme see Fernand Henry's *Les Sonnets Portugais* (1905), which contains the third French translation of the Sonnets from the Portuguese, along with a sympathetic life of the author and a just appreciation of her writings. M. Henry is struck, as must be all critical readers, by the fact that Mrs. Browning's prose—her published correspondence—is not marred by the faults apparent in much of her verse.

have again and again to grieve at a touch of incongruity, a strained note which vitiates the art. Even in these "Sonnets" that note is not absent; but it is rare here, and it is quickly forgotten in the rush of noble passion outpoured in tone seraphic.

No technical analysis can discover the elements of endless attraction and power of inspiration contained in these poems. It would seem as if the breaking down of the barrier between octave and sestet, in this case, was by instinctive and fortunate choice, and in accordance with the peculiar and individual flow of thought and diction. This thought and this diction are indeed intensely individual; they are tinged with the artistic habit and the singular experience of this one woman,—an invalid, familiar with the thought

of death, and a scholarly and accomplished poet,—loved, as it seemed to her miraculously, by a strong man and a great poet. Her education and her life-history were different from other women's; her lover was infinitely different from other men. Nevertheless, these accidents of circumstance offer no interference to the universality of the appeal of her inspired song; and the lyric passion of these "Sonnets" will remain forever a unique, vital, and typical expression of the awakening and consecration of love in the heart of woman.

Indeed, these "Sonnets," in their profound vision, their flaming sincerity, the eloquence with which they express the utter self-abnegation no less than the self-assertion of genuine love, transcend the distinctions of sex and proclaim au-

thentically not only the woman's part, but, also, that which is common, in the master passion, to both woman and man.

But the artistic language of her love-experience was not confined to this great poem-series. It was framed also in other exquisite and noble verse, namely, in the six poems, "Life and Love," "A Denial," "Proof and Disproof," "Question and Answer," "Inclusions," and "Insufficiency," which are printed in Mrs. Browning's works just before the "Sonnets from the Portuguese."¹

Her poem-series of "Casa Guidi Windows" gives us delightful glimpses of their common joy—in later, peaceful, married years—in those Italian scenes which were to each a passion:

¹ See the Coxhoe edition; also The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Mr. Gosse's Essay.

And Vallombrosa, we two went to
see
Last June, beloved companion,—
where sublime
The mountains live in holy families,
And the slow pine woods ever
climb and climb
Half up their breasts.

.
How oft, indeed,
We 've sent our souls out from the
rigid north,
On bare white feet which would not
print nor bleed,
To climb the Alpine passes and look
forth,
Where booming low the Lombard
rivers lead .
To gardens, vineyards, all a dream
is worth,—
Sights, thou and I, Love, have
seen afterward
From Tuscan Bellosguardo, wide
awake,
When, standing on the actual
blessed sward
Where Galileo stood at nights to take
The vision of the stars, we have
found it hard,
Gazing upon the earth and heaven,
to make
A choice of beauty.

II

IT is extremely interesting to find not only that Browning did not know that his friend was constantly expressing her intimate thought of him in verse, but that he gave a reason for the fact that he did not express his own affection for her in poetic form. In the April of 1845, three weeks before their meeting, he wrote: "I think I will really write verse to you some day." And a year later, April 14, 1846, he says he will see her the next day, adding: "I will tell you many things, it seems to me now, but when I am with you they always float out of mind. The feelings must

remain unwritten—unsung too, I fear. I very often fancy that if I had never before resorted to *that* mode of expression, to singing,—poetry—*now* I should resort to it, discover it! Whereas now—my very use and experience of it deters me—if one phrase of mine should seem ‘poetical’ in Mrs. Procter’s sense—a conscious exaggeration,—put in for effect! only *seem*, I say! So I dare not try yet—but one day!”

The above words are the very precursor and proem of “One Word More”:

What of Rafael’s sonnets, Dante’s
 picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that
 longs not
Once, and only once, and for one
 only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a
 language
Fit and fair and simple and suffi-
 cient—

Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned
his nature.

Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper
dowry, —

Does he paint? he fain would write
a poem, —

Does he write? he fain would paint
a picture,

Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one
only,

So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's
sorrow.

.

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you
statues,

Make you music that should all-
express me ;

So it seems : I stand on my attain-
ment.

This of verse alone, one life allows
me ;

Verse and nothing else have I to
give you.

Other heights in other lives, God
willing :

All the gifts from all the heights,
your own, Love!

So little need was there in their life together for expression in art of their feeling for each other that Browning's "one day" did not come till nine years after his letter of 1846 promising a poem to her. "One Word More" was written in September, 1855, at 13 Dorset Street, London, while Mr. and Mrs. Browning were staying there with Miss Browning. Professor Dowden says truly that "the year 1855 was a fortunate year for English poetry." The book of Browning's "Men and Women" was published in the autumn, with its "beautiful epilogue, addressed to E. B. B." A few months before had appeared Tennyson's "Maud." It was one memorable night during this autumn, by the way, that occurred the reading of the whole of "Maud" by its author, with the Brownings and

Rossettis as audience, of which Dante Rossetti's sketch is a well-known relic. It will be remembered that the reading of "Maud" by the author was followed by "Fra Lippo Lippi" read by Browning.

"One Word More" is the only poem written during his wife's lifetime that is openly addressed to her by Browning.¹ How much of his wife, and of his experience as her lifelong lover, went into his poetry it would be impossible accurately to detect and measure. So elusive are the workings of the artist's mind, so replete with suggestions and analogies are the poet's dreams, so full of meaning within meaning may be the images and symbols of

¹ Mr. George Willis Cooke, in *A Guide Book to the Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning*, quotes from W. M. Rossetti's article in the *Academy* concerning certain inaccurate references of Browning to Dante in this poem.

poetry, it would be idle to endeavor to determine where invention ends, and exact description and autobiographical confession begin. Of this we may be sure, that the imagination of Browning was immeasurably enriched and deeply and permanently colored by his relation to his wife, and by her personality and her art, as in like manner was her imagination by him; and that in one poem, his longest, "The Ring and the Book," her influence was direct and dominating. As "One Word More" was the only poem publicly addressed to Mrs. Browning by her husband during her life, so the references to her in the *Pacchiarotto* "Epilogue," and in "The Ring and the Book" and the last three lines of "Prospice" seem to be the only open references to her in his poetry after her death.

As she referred directly to her husband in "Casa Guidi Windows," so there are minor references in his poems which point to his living wife, as in "By the Fireside":

I will speak now,
No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping
it,
Mutely, my heart knows how—

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt
as rhyme;

and in "The Guardian Angel,
a Picture of Fano," where they
had been together:

We were at Fano, and three times
we went
To sit and see him in his chapel
there,
And drink his beauty to our soul's
content
—My angel with me too:

Again in the last stanza :

My love is here.

William Sharp, in his "Life of Browning," says he has been told that "'Two in the Campagna' was as actually personal as 'The Guardian Angel,'" though "too universally true to be merely personal." "A Face," which has been thought to be, possibly, a portrait of Mrs. Browning, really describes Emily Patmore, daughter of the poet, Coventry Patmore.¹

The lyric, "My Star," has been held, according to the Riverside Edition, and other authorities, to refer pointedly to the poet's wife :

MY STAR

All I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)

¹ Robert Browning, by Professor Dowden.

Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red, and the
blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a
flower, hangs furl'd:
They must solace themselves with
the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a
world?
Mine has opened its soul to me;
therefore I love it.

On the question as to whether it is, in fact, Mrs. Browning who is here imaged I am permitted to quote from private letters of Miss Charlotte Porter, who says: "There is, I think, no 'absolutely authentic proof' that 'My Star' is addressed to Mrs. Browning. There is a tradition that it is. I have always found 'It is said' echoed as to 'My Star,' just as it is in the Riverside note and in notes preceding that. And it is so

long established a hearsay that I shall not be surprised if some one is found to say that 'Browning told me so.' As you know, the place given it by Browning in the 'Selected Poems,' first in Vol. I, may be significant; but, on the other hand, it appeared for the first time in 'Men and Women' (1855), without distinctive place, namely, thirteenth, between 'A Serenade' and 'Instans Tyrannus.' I think I must add that, personally, I do not believe, for 'exquisite reasons' of my own, that 'My Star' was written in any peculiar sense to Mrs. Browning, while I think scarcely any love-lyric he published after they met does not taste of her 'as the wine must taste of its own grapes.' There are things, like this, that are imaginatively dramatized out of—out and

away from—some section of a mood inspired by her.”

I must add that some who were close to Browning write to me from Italy that they do not think “My Star” referred to her, because he so often used it in deference to requests for autographs. That she was his “Star,” in a sense, we have his own authority for saying—in his letter to her postmarked November 10, 1845. “I believed,” he says, “in your glorious genius and knew it for a true star from the moment I saw it; long before I had the blessing of knowing it was MY star, with my fortune and futurity in it.”¹

But we must not be confused by resemblances. A poet friend of mine thinks the apparent acknowledgment of inferiority in the “star” of the poem precludes the belief that

¹ The capitals are Browning’s.

the symbol is literally applicable to the poet's wife, though it may have been that the thought of her as a star had to do with its origin.

The discussion as to this lyric has an interest outside of its immediate subject, and I am fortunately able to share with my readers a letter from another poet friend, Mr. Edmund Gosse, of date April 17, 1905. "I cannot," he says, "for a moment consent to believe that 'My Star' refers to E. B. B. What is the analysis of the symbol? Somebody or something is like spar—an object hiding in a dark place, absolutely invisible to the ordinary gazer, but flashing (to the poet, —who stands or moves at a particular angle—) 'now a dart of red, now a dart of blue.' The poet has discovered this 'star,' and has praised it so

loudly and so long that his friends cluster round and 'would fain see it too . . .' But he cannot show it. It is invisible to any eye but his, and they must solace themselves with the publicity of Saturn. All this is incompatible with the idea of E. B. B., who was a famous poet, extremely before the public, herself a 'Saturn' long before R. B. knew her.

"My own conviction," adds Mr. Gosse, "has always been that R. B. did not indicate a person at all by 'My Star.' I think he meant a certain peculiarly individual quality of beauty in verse, or something analogous. He was sure that it flashed its red and blue at him, was a bird to him and a flower, but he despaired (this is quite an early poem) of making his contemporaries see it. They must solace themselves

with Wordsworth, or with Tennyson, or with the famous and popular E. B. B., or with the recognized and hieratic forms of æsthetic beauty. Some years ago, I came across by accident a phrase of the French sculptor Préault. He said : ‘ L’art, c’est cette étoile : je la vois et vous ne la voyez pas.’ Was not R. B. thinking of this ? Préault was by a few years his senior. I have never made use of this, but I give it to you as (I think) important. That the Star had nothing whatever to do with E. B. B. I regard as absolutely certain.”

Long after her death, in the first stanza of the “ Epilogue ” to the “ Pacchiarotto ” volume, we have these words :

“ The poets pour us wine—”
Said the dearest poet I ever knew,
Dearest and greatest and best to
me.

The personal note in "Prospice" is open and evident, as also are the references to his wife in "The Ring and the Book." As to "Prospice,"—written in the autumn following his wife's death,—no nobler, more courageous trumpet-note of conviction and aspiration was ever uttered: no ambiguity here, no grotesquery of thought or phrase, nothing for commentator to clarify or explain. The height of feeling in Browning means the height of clear and adequate expression. The passage in "The Ring and the Book" beginning

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird,

is there in all the writings of Browning a strain of more satisfying and exalted beauty? If Keats should come again and a lover of Browning and of

Keats should wish to convince at a stroke the bright revenant of the high genius and imagination of the later poet, what poem or passage would he be more likely to select? And how exquisitely fitting it is that this should be so! Is it too much to say that nothing endears Browning to his readers quite so strongly as this one lyric burst of celestial passion, spoken not dramatically, but with full and spontaneous personality? And here, too, is the fulfilment of prophecy! For in her letter to him of May 26, 1846, his future wife, while praising his dramatic art and saying that all are agreed that "there is none so great faculty as the dramatic," yet is conscious of wishing him "to take the other crown besides." She desires him, after having made "his own creatures speak in clear

human voices," to speak himself "out of that personality which God made, and with the voice which he tuned into such power and sweetness of speech." "With an inferior power," she pleads, "you might have taken yourself closer to the hearts and lives of men, and made yourself dearer, though being less great. Therefore I do want you to do this with your surpassing power. It will be so easy to you to speak, and so noble when spoken." Noble, indeed, are the poems in which he speaks thus straightforwardly and without dramatic indirection, as in this "lyric Love" invocation, in "One Word More," in "Prospice," and (with many other poems) in his swan-song of the "Epilogue" to "Asolando"—this last a twin utterance to "Prospice,"

and a shout in the face of death.¹

The "lyric Love" passage in "The Ring and the Book" recalls the poignant personal note in the invocation to Light at the beginning of the third book of "Paradise Lost." The lost and unreturning Light of the blind Milton, which, in his invocation, he desired should be replaced by the inward Celestial Light, and Browning's lost companion, "half angel and half bird," the benediction of whose spirit he rapturously craved—these are the occasions of the noblest passages in the chief poems of the early and the later bard.

The closing lines of "The Ring and the Book" take up the figure of the ring again,

¹ How characteristic that Browning's swan-song was a shout of defiance in the face of death, while Tennyson's (in *Crossing the Bar*) was one of his most musical chants.

from the first book, and recur to the personal note—the “lyric Love”:

If the rough ore be rounded to a ring!
Render all duty which good ring
 should do,
And failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—
Might mine but lie outside thine,
 Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet
 praised)
Linking our England to his Italy.

This “ring of verse” was that referred to by the Italian poet Tommaseo in the inscription placed by the city of Florence on the walls of Casa Guidi, which in translation is: “Here wrote and died E. B. Browning, who . . . made with her golden verse a ring linking Italy to England.”¹

But there is more of his lost

¹The Camberwell edition of Robert Browning; Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke, editors.

wife in "The Ring and the Book" than the direct references of the poet, as is shown by one of the most interesting passages of Mrs. Orr's "Life," where she gives her reasons for believing that Mrs. Browning's spiritual presence with the author was "more than a presiding memory of the heart; that it entered largely into the conception of Pompilia, and, so far as this depended on it, the character of the whole book."

A poet has said that "as for Browning's love for his wife, nothing more tender and chivalrous has ever been told of ideal lovers in an ideal romance. It is so beautiful a story that one often prefers it to the sweetest or loftiest poem that came from the lips of either."¹ True; yet the lives of the two as poets make the story what it is.

¹ William Sharp's *Life of Browning*.

Their lives, indeed, were poems, as Milton said poets' lives should be, and their poetry was their life, as Mrs. Browning said should also be true of poets. The world could spare neither the lives nor the poems, and especially would it be poor without those poems in which each sang of the other. Take these together, was there ever, in all the treasury of the world's literature, so angelical an antiphony of love, anthemed by the two radiant and immortal lovers themselves?

R. W. G.

SONNETS FROM THE
PORTUGUESE



SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

I

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus
 had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and
 wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand
 appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or
 young:
And, as I mused it in his antique
 tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through
 my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melan-
 choly years,

Those of my own life, who by turns
 had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway
 I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape
 did move
Behind me, and drew me backward
 by the hair ;
And a voice said in mastery, while
 I strove,—
“Guess now who holds thee?”—
 “Death,” I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang,—“Not
 Death, but Love.”

BUT only three in all God's universe
 Have heard this word thou hast
 said,—Himself, beside
 Thee speaking, and me listening!
 and replied
 One of us . . . *that* was God, . . .
 and laid the curse
 So darkly on my eyelids, as to
 amerce
 My sight from seeing thee,—that if
 I had died,
 The deathweights, placed there,
 would have signified
 Less absolute exclusion. “Nay”
 is worse

From God than from all others, O
my friend!
Men could not part us with their
worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the
tempests bend ;
Our hands would touch for all the
mountain-bars :
And, heaven being rolled between
us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for
the stars.

III

UNLIKE are we, unlike, O princely
Heart!

Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look
surprise

On one another, as they strike
athwart

Their wings in passing. Thou,
bethink thee, art

A guest for queens to social
pageantries,

With gages from a hundred brighter
eyes

Than tears even can make mine, to
play thy part

Of chief musician. What hast
 thou to do
With looking from the lattice-lights
 at me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer,
 singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress
 tree?
The chrism is on thine head,—on
 mine, the dew,—
And Death must dig the level
 where these agree.

IV

THOU hast thy calling to some
palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems!
where
The dancers will break footing,
from the care .
Of watching up thy pregnant lips
for more.
And dost thou lift this house's
latch too poor
For hand of thine? and canst thou
think and bear
To let thy music drop here un-
aware

In folds of golden fulness at my
door?
Look up and see the casement
broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in
the roof!
My cricket chirps against thy man-
dolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further
proof
Of desolation! there 's a voice
within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing
. . . alone, aloof.

I LIFT my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I over-
turn

The ashes at thy feet. Behold
and see

What a great heap of grief lay hid
in me,

And how the red wild sparkles
dimly burn

Through the ashen greyness. If
thy foot in scorn

Could tread them out to darkness
utterly,

It might be well perhaps. But if
instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind
to blow
The grey dust up, . . . those laurels
on thine head,
O my Belovëd, will not shield thee
so,
That none of all the fires shall
scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther
off then! go.

Go from me. Yet I feel that I
shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow.
Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my
door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my
hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I
forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The
widest land

Doom takes to part us, leaves thy
heart in mine
With pulses that beat double.
What I do
And what I dream include thee, as
the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And
when I sue
God for myself, He hears that
name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears
of two.

THE face of all the world is changed,
 I think,
 Since first I heard the footsteps of
 thy soul
 Move still, oh, still, beside me, as
 they stole
 Betwixt me and the dreadful outer
 brink
 Of obvious death, where I, who
 thought to sink,
 Was caught up into love, and
 taught the whole
 Of life in a new rhythm. The cup
 of dole
 God gave for baptism, I am fain
 to drink,

And praise its sweetness, Sweet,
with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are
changed away
For where thou art or shalt be,
there or here ;
And this . . . this lute and song . . .
loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only
dear
Because thy name moves right in
what they say.

VIII

WHAT can I give thee back, O
liberal
And princely giver, who hast
brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, un-
stained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of
the wall
For such as I to take or leave
withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most
manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back
at all?

Not so ; not cold,—but very poor
instead.

Ask God who knows. For frequent
tears have run

The colours from my life, and left so
dead

And pale a stuff, it were not fitly
done

To give the same as pillow to thy
head.

Go farther! let it serve to trample
on.

.

CAN it be right to give what I can
give?

To let thee sit beneath the fall of
tears

As salt as mine, and hear the sigh-
ing years

Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles
which fail to live

For all thy adjurations? O my
fears,

That this can scarce be right! We
are not peers,

So to be lovers; and I own, and
grieve,

That givers of such gifts as mine
are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous.
Out, alas!
I will not soil thy purple with my
dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy
Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love—which
were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee! let it
pass.

YET, love, mere love, is beautiful
indeed
And worthy of acceptation. Fire
is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal
light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-
plank or weed:
And love is fire. And when I say
at need
I love thee . . . mark! . . . I love
thee—in thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays
that proceed

Out of my face toward thine.
 There 's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest :
 meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while
 loving so.
And what I *feel*, across the inferior
 features
Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and
 show
How that great work of Love en-
 hances Nature's.

AND therefore if to love can be
 desert,
 I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as
 pale
 As these you see, and trembling
 knees that fail
 To bear the burden of a heavy
 heart,—
 This weary minstrel-life that once
 was girt
 To climb Aornus, and can scarce
 avail
 To pipe now 'gainst the valley
 nightingale
 A melancholy music,—why advert

To these things? O Belovëd, it is
plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy
place!
And yet, because I love thee, I
obtain
From that same love this vindicat-
ing grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in
vain,—
To bless thee, yet renounce thee
to thy face.

INDEED this very love which is my
boast,
And which, when rising up from
breast to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large
enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the
inner cost,—
This love even, all my worth, to
the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless
that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown
me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with
mine were crossed,

And love called love. And thus, I
cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of
my own :
Thy soul hath snatched up mine
all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden
throne,—
And that I love (O soul, we must
be meek!)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

XIII

AND wilt thou have me fashion
 into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words
 enough,
And hold the torch out, while the
 winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on
 each?—
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot
 teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far
 off
From myself—me—that I should
 bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of
 reach.

Nay, let the silence of my woman-
hood
Commend my woman-love to thy
belief,—
Seeing that I stand unwon, how-
ever wooed,
And rend the garment of my life,
in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless for-
titude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey
its grief.

IF thou must love me, let it be for
 nought
 Except for love's sake only. Do
 not say
 " I love her for her smile—her look
 —her way
 Of speaking gently,—for a trick of
 thought
 That falls in well with mine, and
 certes brought
 A sense of pleasant ease on such a
 day"—
 For these things in themselves,
 Belovèd, may
 Be changed, or change for thee,—
 and love, so wrought,

May be unwrought so. Neither
love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my
cheeks dry,—
A creature might forget to weep,
who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy
love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that
evermore
Thou may'st love on, through love's
eternity.

ACCUSE me not, beseech thee, that
I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front
of thine ;
For we two look two ways, and
cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow
and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubt-
ing care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline ;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in
love's divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the
outer air

Were most impossible failure, if I
 strove
To fail so. But I look on thee—
 on thee—
Beholding, besides love, the end of
 love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory ;
As one who sits and gazes from
 above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

AND yet, because thou overcomest
 so,
 Because thou art more noble and
 like a king,
 Thou canst prevail against my fears
 and fling
 Thy purple round me, till my heart
 shall grow
 Too close against thine heart
 henceforth to know
 How it shook when alone. Why,
 conquering
 May prove as lordly and complete
 a thing
 In lifting upward, as in crushing
 low!

And as a vanquished soldier yields
his sword
To one who lifts him from the
bloody earth,
Even so, Belovëd, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* in-
vite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the
word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my
worth.

XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all
the notes
God set between His *After* and
Before,
And strike up and strike off the
general roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody
that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou
canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's
will devotes

Thine to such ends, and mine to
wait on thine.

How, Dearest, wilt thou have me
for most use?

A hope, to sing by gladly? or a
fine

Sad memory, with thy songs to in-
terfuse?

A shade, in which to sing—of palm
or pine?

A grave, on which to rest from
singing? Choose.

I NEVER gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to
 thee,
Which now upon my fingers
 thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length
 and say
“Take it.” My day of youth went
 yesterday ;
My hair no longer bounds to my
 foot’s glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-
 tree,
As girls do, any more : it only may

Now shade on two pale cheeks the
mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head
that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought
the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is
justified,—
Take it thou,—finding pure, from
all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when
she died.

THE soul's Rialto hath its merchan-
dise ;
I barter curl for curl upon that
mart,
And from my poet's forehead to
my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs
argosies,—
As purply black, as erst to Pindar's
eyes
The dim purpureal tresses gloomed
athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For
this counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Belov'd, I
surmise,

Still lingers on thy curl, it is so
black!

Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing
breath,

I tie the shadows safe from gliding
back,

And lay the gift where nothing hin-
dereth ;

Here on my heart, as on thy brow,
to lack

No natural heat till mine grows
cold in death.

BELOVED, my Belovëd, when I
 think
That thou wast in the world a year
 ago,
What time I sat alone here in the
 snow
And saw no footprint, heard the
 silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link
 by link,
Went counting all my chains as if
 that so
They never could fall off at any
 blow
Struck by thy possible hand,—why,
 thus I drink

Of life's great cup of wonder!
Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or
night
With personal act or speech,—nor
ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the
blossoms white
'Thou sawest growing! Atheists
are as dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence
out of sight.

SAY over again, and yet once over
again,
That thou dost love me. Though
the word repeated
Should seem "a cuckoo-song," as
thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or
plain,
Valley and wood, without her
cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her
green completed.
Belovéd, I, amid the darkness
greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that
doubt's pain

Cry, "Speak once more—thou
lovest!" Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in
heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each
shall crown the year?
Say thou dost love me, love me,
love me—toll
The silver iterance! —only mind-
ing, Dear,
To love me also in silence with thy
soul.

WHEN our two souls stand up erect
and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh
and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break
into fire
At either curvèd point,—what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we
should not long
Be here contented? Think. In
mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and
aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song

Into our deep, dear silence. Let
us stay
Rather on earth, Belovëd,—where
the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil
away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a
day,
With darkness and the death-hour
rounding it.

Is it indeed so? If I lay here
dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing
mine?
And would the sun for thee more
coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling
round my head?
I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I
read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am
thine—
But . . . so much to thee? Can I
pour thy wine
While my hands tremble? Then
my soul, instead

Of dreams of death, resumes life's
lower range.

Then, love me, Love! Look on
me—breathe on me!

As brighter ladies do not count it
strange,

For love, to give up acres and de-
gree,

I yield the grave for thy sake, and
exchange

My near sweet view of Heaven, for
earth with thee!

XXIV

LET the world's sharpness, like a
 clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now
 soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human
 strife
After the click of the shutting.
 Life to life—
I lean upon thee, Dear, without
 alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a
 charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who
 if rife

Are weak to injure. Very whitely
still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots,
accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop
not fewer ;
Growing straight, out of man's
reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can
make us poor.

A HEAVY heart, Belovëd, have I
borne
From year to year until I saw thy
face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the
place
Of all those natural joys as lightly
worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted
in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time.
Hopes apace
Were changed to long despairs, till
God's own grace
Could scarcely lift above the world
forlorn

My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst
bid me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly
great
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a
thing
Which its own nature doth precipi-
tate,
While thine doth close above it,
mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccom-
plished fate.

I LIVED with visions for my com-
pany
Instead of men and women, years
ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor
thought to know
A sweeter music than they played
to me.
But soon their trailing purple was
not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did
silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind
below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU
didst come—to be,

Belovéd, what they seemed. Their
shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendours (better,
yet the same,
As river-water hallowed into fonts),
Met in thee, and from out thee
overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all
wants :
Because God's gifts put man's best
dreams to shame.

XXVII

My own Belovëd, who hast lifted
me
From this drear flat of earth where
I was thrown,
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets,
blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hope-
fully
Shines out again, as all the angels
see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own,
my own,
Who camest to me when the world
was gone,
And I who looked for only God,
found *thee*!

I find thee ; I am safe, and strong,
and glad.

As one who stands in dewless
asphodel

Looks backward on the tedious
time he had

In the upper life,—so I, with
bosom-swell,

Make witness, here, between the
good and bad,

That Love, as strong as Death, re-
trieves as well.

XXVIII

My letters! all dead paper, mute
and white!
And yet they seem alive and quiv-
ering
Against my tremulous hands which
loose the string
And let them drop down on my
knee to-night,
This said,—he wished to have me
in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day
in spring
To come and touch my hand . . .
a simple thing,
Yet I wept for it! —this, . . . the
paper 's light . . .

Said, *Dear, I love thee*; and I sank
and quailed
As if God's future thundered on
my past.
This said, *I am thine*—and so its
ink has paled
With lying at my heart that beat
too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words
have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at
last!

I THINK of thee! —my thoughts do
 twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a
 tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon
 there 's nought to see
Except the straggling green which
 hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it under-
 stood
I will not have my thoughts instead
 of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather,
 instantly
Renew thy presence ; as a strong
 tree should,

Rustle thy boughs and set thy
trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery
which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,—burst, shattered,
everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see
and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a
new air,
I do not think of thee—I am too
near thee.

I SEE thine image through my tears
to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling.
How
Refer the cause? — Belov'd, is it
thou
Or I, who makes me sad? The
acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful
rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate
brow
On the altar-stair. I hear thy
voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art
out of sight,

As he, in his swooning ears, the
 choir's amen.
Belovëd, dost thou love? or did I
 see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted
 when
Too vehement light dilated my
 ideal,
For my soul's eyes? Will that
 light come again,
As now these tears come—falling
 hot and real?

THOU comest ! all is said without
a word.

I sit beneath thy looks, as children
do

In the noon-sun, with souls that
tremble through

Their happy eyelids from an un-
averred

Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold,
I erred

In that last doubt ! and yet I can-
not rue

The sin most, but the occasion—
that we two

Should for a moment stand unmin-
istered

By a mutual presence. Ah, keep
near and close,
'Thou dovelike help ! and, when
my fears would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely in-
terpose :
Brood down with thy divine suf-
ficiencies
These thoughts which tremble
when bereft of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the
skies.

THE first time that the sun rose on
thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to
the moon
To slacken all those bonds which
seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting
troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought,
may quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed
not one
For such man's love! — more like
an out-of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be
wroth

To spoil his song with, and which,
 snatched in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding
 note.

I did not wrong myself so, but I
 placed

A wrong on *thee*. For perfect
 strains may float

'Neath master-hands, from instru-
 ments defaced,—

And great souls, at one stroke, may
 do and doat.

.

XXXIII

YES, call me by my pet-name !
let me hear
The name I used to run at, when
a child,
From innocent play, and leave the
cowslips piled,
To glance up in some face that
proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss
the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn
and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's unde-
filed,
Call me no longer. Silence on the
bier,

While I call God—call God ! —So
let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now ex-
animate.
Gather the north flowers to com-
plete the south,
And catch the early love up in the
late.
Yes, call me by that name,—and I,
in truth,
With the same heart, will answer
and not wait.

XXXIV

WITH the same heart, I said, I 'll
 answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me
 by my name—
Lo, the vain promise ! is the same,
 the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's
 strategy ?
When called before, I told how
 hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off
 from a game,
To run and answer with the smile
 that came
At play last moment, and went on
 with me

Through my obedience. When I
answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from
solitude ;
Yet still my heart goes to thee—
ponder how—
Not as to a single good, but all my
good !
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and
allow
That no child's foot could run fast
as this blood.

IF I leave all for thee, wilt thou
exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never
miss
Home-talk and blessing and the
common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor
count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new
range
Of walls and floors, another home
than this?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me
which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to
know change?

That 's hardest. If to conquer love,
has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all
things prove ;
For grief indeed is love and grief
beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard
to love.
Yet love me—wilt thou? Open
thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of
thy dove.

WHEN we met first and loved, I did
not build
Upon the event with marble. Could
it mean
To last, a love set pendulous be-
tween
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather
thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed
to gild
The onward path, and feared to
overlean
A finger even. And, though I have
grown serene
And strong since then, I think that
God has willed

A still renewable fear . . . O love,
O troth . . .
Lest these enclasp'd hands should
never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down be-
tween us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips
being cold.
And Love, be false ! if *he*, to keep
one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star
foretold.

XXXVII

PARDON, oh, pardon, that my soul
 should make,
Of all that strong divineness which
 I know
For thine and thee, an image only
 so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift
 and break.
It is that distant years which did
 not take
Thy sovranly, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain
 to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly
 to forsake

Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless
counterfeit :

As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in
port,

His guardian sea-god to commem-
orate,

Should set a sculptured porpoise,
gills a-snort

And vibrant tail, within the temple-
gate.

XXXVIII

FIRST time he kissed me, he but
only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith
I write ;
And ever since, it grew more clean
and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with
its " Oh, list,"
When the angels speak. A ring of
amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to
my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second
passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead,
and half missed,

Half falling on the hair. O beyond
meed !
That was the chrism of love, which
love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did
precede.
The third upon my lips was folded
down
In perfect, purple state ; since when,
indeed,
I have been proud and said, “ My
love, my own.”

XXXIX

BECAUSE thou hast the power and
 own'st the grace
To look through and behind this
 mask of me
(Against which years have beat
 thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my
 soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's
 race,—
Because thou hast the faith and
 love to see,
Through that same soul's distract-
 ing lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a
 place

In the new Heavens,—because nor
 sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's
 neighbourhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn
 to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of
 all, self-viewed,—
Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest,
 teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou
 dost, good !

OH, yes ! they love through all this
world of ours !

I will not gainsay love, called love
forsooth.

I have heard love talked in my
early youth,

And since, not so long back but
that the flowers

Then gathered, smell still. Mus-
sulmans and Giaours

Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and
have no ruth

For any weeping. Polypheme's
white tooth

Slips on the nut if, after frequent
showers,

The shell is over-smooth,—and not
so much
Will turn the thing called love,
aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art
not such
A lover, my Belovëd ! thou canst
wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to
bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry
“ Too late.”

I THANK all who have loved me in
 their hearts,
 With thanks and love from mine.
 Deep thanks to all
 Who paused a little near the prison-
 wall
 To hear my music in its louder
 parts
 Ere they went onward, each one
 to the mart's
 Or temple's occupation, beyond
 call.
 But thou, who, in my voice's sink
 and fall
 When the sob took it, thy divinest
 Art's

Own instrument didst drop down
at thy foot
To hearken what I said between
my tears, . . .
Instruct me how to thank thee !
Oh, to shoot
My soul's full meaning into future
years,
That *they* should lend it utterance,
and salute
Love that endures, from Life that
disappears !

*“ My future will not copy fair my
past ” —*

I wrote that once ; and thinking at
my side

My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look
upcast

To the white throne of God, I
turned at last,

And there, instead, saw thee, not
unallied

To angels in thy soul ! Then I,
long tried

By natural ills, received the com-
fort fast,

While budding, at thy sight, my
 pilgrim's staff
Gave out green leaves with morn-
 ing dews impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first
 half :
Leave here the pages with long
 musing curled,
And write me new my future's epi-
 graph,
New angel mine, unhopèd for in
 the world !

How do I love thee? Let me
count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and
breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling
out of sight

For the ends of Being and ideal
Grace.

I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-
light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for
Right ;

I love thee purely, as they turn
from Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to
use

In my old griefs, and with my
childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to
lose

With my lost saints,—I love thee
with the breath,

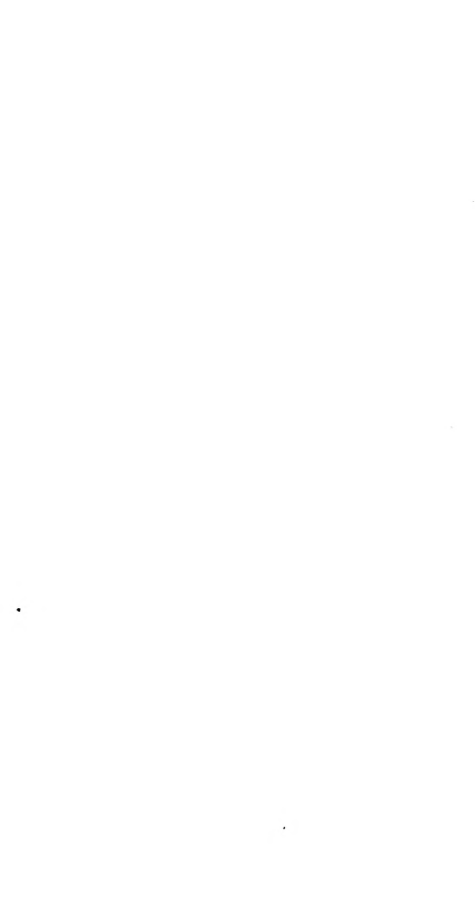
Smiles, tears, of all my life ! —and,
if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after
death.

BELOVED, thou hast brought me
 many flowers
 Plucked in the garden, all the sum-
 mer through
 And winter, and it seemed as if
 they grew
 In this close room, nor missed the
 sun and showers.
 So, in the like name of that love of
 ours,
 Take back these thoughts which
 here unfolded too,
 And which on warm and cold days
 I withdrew
 From my heart's ground. Indeed,
 those beds and bowers

Be overgrown with bitter weeds
and rue,
And wait thy weeding ; yet here 's
eglantine,
Here 's ivy ! —take them, as I used
to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where
they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their
colours true,
And tell thy soul, their roots are left
in mine.

SIX LYRICS



LIFE AND LOVE

I

FAST this Life of mine was dying,
Blind already and calm as
death,
Snowflakes on her bosom lying
Scarcely heaving with her breath.

II

Love came by, and having known
her
In a dream of fabled lands,
Gently stooped, and laid upon her
Mystic chrism of holy hands;

III

Drew his smile across her folded
 Eyelids, as the swallow dips ;
Breathed as finely as the cold did,
 Through the locking of her lips.

IV

So, when Life looked upward,
 being
 Warmed and breathed on from
 above,
What sight could she have for
 seeing,
Evermore . . . but only LOVE ?

A DENIAL

I

WE have met late — it is too late
to meet,

O friend, not more than friend!
Death's forecome shroud is tangled
round my feet,
And if I step or stir, I touch the
end.

In this last jeopardy
Can I approach thee, I, who cannot move?
How shall I answer thy request for
love?
Look in my face and see.

II

I love thee not, I dare not love
thee! go

In silence; drop my hand.
If thou seek roses, seek them
where they blow
In garden-alleys, not in desert-sand.
Can life and death agree,
That thou shouldst stoop thy song
to my complaint?
I cannot love thee. If the word
is faint,
Look in my face and see.

III

I might have loved thee in some
former days.
Oh, then, my spirits had leapt
As now they sink, at hearing thy
love-praise!
Before these faded cheeks were
overwept,

Had this been asked of me,
To love thee with my whole strong
heart and head,—
I should have said still . . . yes,
but *smiled* and said,
“Look in my face and see !”

IV

But now . . . God sees me, God,
who took my heart
And drowned it in life's surge.
In all your wide warm earth I
have no part—
A light song overcomes me like a
dirge.
Could Love's great harmony
The saints keep step to when their
bonds are loose,
Not weigh me down ? am *I* a
wife to choose ?
Look in my face and see—

V

While I behold, as plain as one
 who dreams,
 Some woman of full worth,
 Whose voice, as cadenced as a
 silver stream's,
 Shall prove the fountain-soul which
 sends it forth ;
 One younger, more thought-free
 And fair and gay, than I, thou
 must forget,
 With brighter eyes than these . . .
 which are not wet . . .
 Look in my face and see!

VI

So farewell thou, whom I have
 known too late
 To let thee come so near.
 Be counted happy while men call
 thee great,
 And one belov'd woman feels thee
 dear! —

Not I! —that cannot be.
I am lost, I am changed,—I must
go farther, where
The change shall take me worse,
and no one dare
Look in my face and see.

VII

Meantime I bless thee. By these
thoughts of mine
I bless thee from all such!
I bless thy lamp to oil, thy cup to
wine,
Thy hearth to joy, thy hand to an
equal touch
Of loyal troth. For me,
I love thee not, I love thee not! —
away!
Here 's no more courage in my
soul to say
“Look in my face and see.”

PROOF AND DISPROOF

I

Dost thou love me, my Belovëd?
Who shall answer yes or no?
What is provëd or disprovëd
When my soul inquireth so,
Dost thou love me, my Belovëd?

II

I have seen thy heart to-day,
Never open to the crowd,
While to love me aye and aye
Was the vow as it was vowed
By thine eyes of steadfast grey.

Now I sit alone, alone—

And the hot tears break and burn.

Now, Belovëd, thou art gone,

Doubt and terror have their turn.

Is it love that I have known?

IV

I have known some bitter things,—

Anguish, anger, solitude.

Year by year an evil brings,

Year by year denies a good ;

March winds violate my springs.

V

I have known how sickness bends,

I have known how sorrow

breaks,—

How quick hopes have sudden ends,

How the heart thinks till it aches

Of the smile of buried friends.

VI

Last, I have known *thee*, my brave
Noble thinker, lover, doer !

The best knowledge last I have.

But thou comest as the thrower
Of fresh flowers upon a grave.

VII

Count what feelings used to move
me !

Can this love assort with those?
Thou, who art so far above me,
Wilt thou stoop so, for repose?
Is it true that thou canst love me?

VIII

Do not blame me if I doubt thee.

I can call love by its name
When thine arm is wrapt about me ;
But even love seems not the same,
When I sit alone, without thee.

IX

In thy clear eyes I descried
 Many a proof of love, to-day ;
 But to-night, those unbelied
 Speechful eyes being gone away,
 There 's the proof to seek, beside.

X

Dost thou love me, my Belovëd?
 Only *thou* canst answer yes !
 And, thou gone, the proof 's dis-
 provëd,
 And the cry rings answerless—
 Dost thou love me, my Belovëd?

QUESTION AND ANSWER

I

LOVE you seek for, presupposes
Summer heat and sunny glow.
Tell me, do you find moss-roses
Budding, blooming in the snow?
Snow might kill the rose-tree's
root—
Shake it quickly from your foot,
Lest it harm you as you go.

II

From the ivy where it dapples
A grey ruin, stone by stone,
Do you look for grapes or apples,
Or for sad green leaves alone?
Pluck the leaves off, two or three—
Keep them for morality
When you shall be safe and gone.

INCLUSIONS

I

OH, wilt thou have my hand, Dear,
to lie along in thine?

As a little stone in a running stream,
it seems to lie and pine.

Now drop the poor pale hand, Dear,
unfit to plight with thine.

II

Oh, wilt thou have my cheek, Dear,
drawn closer to thine own?

My cheek is white, my cheek is worn,
by many a tear run down.

Now leave a little space, Dear, lest
it should wet thine own.

III

Oh, must thou have my soul, Dear,
 commingled with thy soul?—
Red grows the cheek, and warm the
 hand ; the part is in the whole :
Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate,
 when soul is joined to soul.

INSUFFICIENCY

I

THERE is no one beside thee and
no one above thee,
Thou standest alone as the
nightingale sings !
And my words that would praise
thee are impotent things,
For none can express thee though
all should approve thee.
I love thee so, Dear, that I only
can love thee.

II

Say, what can I do for thee? weary
thee, grieve thee?

Lean on thy shoulder, new bur-
dens to add?

Weep my tears over thee, making
thee sad?

Oh, hold me not—love me not ! let
me retrieve thee.

I love thee so, Dear, that I only
can leave thee.





This portrait was executed at Rome, in 1859,
as a companion to that of E. B. now in the
National Portrait Gallery, by Field Talford; where
properly it remained. I agree that it now belongs
to my friend Gope Robert Browning,
Apr. 10. '85.



ONE WORD MORE
PROSPICE
“O LYRIC LOVE”

BY
ROBERT BROWNING



ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.

London, September, 1855

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and
women

Naming me the fifty poems finished!

Take them, Love, the book and me
together :

Where the heart lies, let the brain
lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain
volume

III

Dinted with the silver-pointed
pencil
Else he only used to draw Ma-
donnas :
These, the world might view—but
one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your
heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her
lifetime?
Did she drop, his lady of the son-
nets,
Die, and let it drop beside her
pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's
glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so
loving—
Cheek, the world was wont to hail
a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned
a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that
 volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of
 Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at
 Madonnas—
Her, San Sisto names, and Her,
 Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that 's left with lilies in the
 Louvre—
Seen by us and all the world in
 circle.

IV

You and I will never read that
 volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's
 apple

Guarded long the treasure-book
and loved it.

Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too,
“Ours, the treasure!”

Suddenly, as rare things will, it
vanished.

v

Dante once prepared to paint an
angel:

Whom to please? You whisper
“Beatrice.”

While he mused and traced it and
retraced it,

(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he
dipped for,

When, his left-hand i' the hair o'
the wicked,

Back he held the brow and pricked
its stigma,

Bit into the live man's flesh for
parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the
writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering
through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he
hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders
loving,
Dante standing, studying his
angel,—
In there broke the folk of his
Inferno.
Says he—"Certain people of im-
portance "
(Such he gave his daily dreadful
line to)
"Entered and would seize, for-
sooth, the poet."
Says the poet—"Then I stopped
my painting."

VI

You and I would rather see that
 angel,
 Painted by the tenderness of
 Dante,
 Would we not ?—than read a fresh
 Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that pic-
 ture.
 While he mused on love and Bea-
 trice,
 While he softened o'er his outlined
 angel,
 In they broke, those " people of
 importance :"
 We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's
 picture ?

This : no artist lives and loves, that
 longs not
Once, and only once, and for one
 only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a
 language
Fit and fair and simple and suffi-
 cient—
Using nature that 's an art to
 others,
Not, this one time, art that 's
 turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper
 dowry,—
Does he paint ? he fain would
 write a poem,—
Does he write ? he fain would
 paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one
 only,

So to be the man and leave the
 artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the ar-
 tist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore ? Heaven's gift
 takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and
 spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd
 beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immor-
 tal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in
 the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in
 doing.
While he smites, how can he but
 remember,
So he smote before, in such a
 peril,

When they stood and mocked—
 “ Shall smiting help us ? ”
When they drank and sneered—
 “ A stroke is easy ! ”
When they wiped their mouths and
 went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks—“ But
 drought was pleasant.”
Thus old memories mar the actual
 triumph ;
Thus the doing savours of dis-
 relish ;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious
 somewhat ;
O'er-importuned brows becloud
 the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness—the
 gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong
 about him,
Sees and knows again those pha-
 lanxed faces,

Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—

“ How shouldst thou, of all men,
smite, and save us ? ”

Guesses what is like to prove the
sequel—

“ Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the
drought was better.”

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic
warrant!

Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven
brilliance,

Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's
imperial fiat.

Never dares the man put off the
prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the
thousands,

(Were she Jethro's daughter, white
and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian
bondslave,)
He would envy you dumb patient
camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the
desert ;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast
be opened)
Hoard and life together for his
mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remain-
ing,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve
you statues,
Make you music that should all-
express me ;

So it seems: I stand on my attainment.

This of verse alone, one life allows
me ;

Verse and nothing else have I to
give you.

Other heights in other lives, God
willing :

All the gifts from all the heights,
your own, Love! .

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails
us—

Shade so finely touched, love's
sense must seize it.

Take these lines, look lovingly and
nearly,

Lines I write the first time and the
last time.

He who works in fresco, steals a
hair-brush,

Curbs the liberal hand, subservient
proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in
little,
Makes a strange art of an art fa-
miliar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with
flowerets.
He who blows through bronze,
may breathe through silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous prin-
cess.
He who writes, may write for once
as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and
women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my
fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their
service,

Speak from every mouth,—the
speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and
sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbe-
lieving :
I am mine and yours—the rest be
all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the
fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true
person,
Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just
this sentence :
Pray you, look on these my men
and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems fin-
ished ;
Where my heart lies, let my brain
lie also !
Poor the speech ; be how I speak,
for all things.

Not but that you know me! Lo,
the moon's self!

Here in London, yonder late in
Florence,

Still we find her face, the thrice-
transfigured.

Curving on a sky imbrued with
colour,

Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a
hair's-breadth.

Full she flared it, lamping Sammi-
niato,

Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and
rounder,

Perfect till the nightingales ap-
plauded.

Now, a piece of her old self, impov-
erished,

Hard to greet, she traverses the
house-roofs,

Hurries with unhandsome thrift of
silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there 's nothing in the moon
noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love
a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a
fancy),
All her magic ('t is the old sweet
mythos),
She would turn a new side to her
mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, hunts-
man, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—
him, even!

Think, the wonder of the moon-
struck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again
in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an
iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it
founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splin-
tered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a
sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed
the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the
Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a
sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clear-
ness

Shone the stone, the sapphire of
that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw
God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows,
none ever shall know.
Only this is sure—the sight were
other,
Not the moon's same side, born
late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in
London.
God be thanked, the meanest of
his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face
the world with,
One to show a woman when he
loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you,
Love!

This to you—yourself my moon of
poets!

Ah, but that 's the world's side,
there 's the wonder,

Thus they see you, praise you,
think they know you!

There, in turn I stand with them
and praise you—

Out of my own self, I dare to
phrase it.

But the best is when I glide from
out them,

Cross a step or two of dubious twi-
light,

Come out on the other side, the
novel

Silent silver lights and darks un-
dreamed of,

Where I hush and bless myself
with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Ma-
donnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread In-
ferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain
I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on
my bosom!

R. B.

PROSPICE

FEAR death?—To feel the fog in
 my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the
 blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press
 of the storm,
The post of the foe ;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in
 a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go :
For the journey is done and the
 summit attained,

And the barriers fall,
Though a battle 's to fight ere the
 guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so — one fight
 more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged
 my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it,
 fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay
 glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best
 to the brave,
The black minute 's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-
 voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,

Shall change, shall become first a
 peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall
 clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

“O LYRIC LOVE”

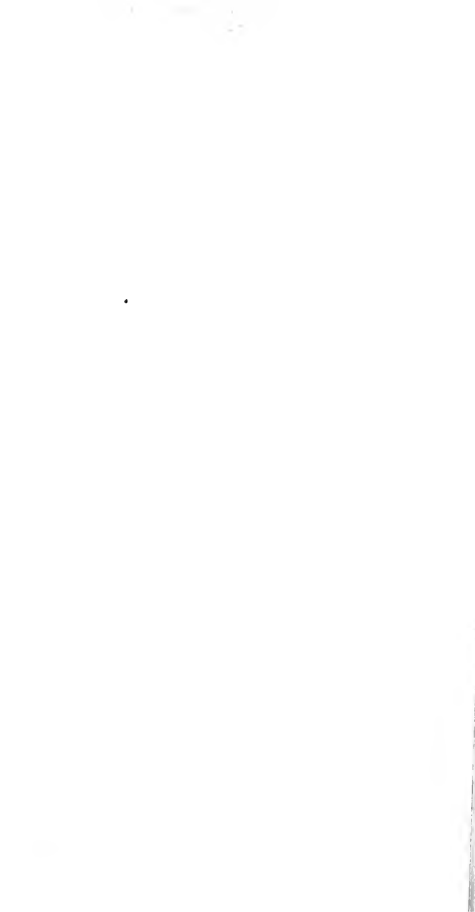
(FROM “THE RING AND THE BOOK”)

O LYRIC Love, half angel and half
bird,
And all a wonder and a wild de-
sire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved
the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier
blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his
face,—
Yet human at the red-ripe of the
heart—
When the first summons from the
darkling earth

Reached thee amid thy chambers,
 blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to
 drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to
 die,—
This is the same voice: can thy
 soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the
 realms of help!
Never may I commence my song,
 my due
To God who best taught song by
 gift of thee,
Except with bent head and be-
 seeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and
 the dark,
What was, again may be; some in-
 terchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy
 very thought,

Some benediction anciently thy
 smile :
—Never conclude, but raising
 hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot
 reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all
 reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so bless-
 ing back
In those thy realms of help, that
 heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy
 face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy
 foot may fall!





Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: March 2009

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